

## 1 Samuel 31 - Thursday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014

- Tonight brings us the end of the book of 1 Samuel and with it the tragic end of the life of Saul and sadly his three sons including Jonathan.
- There are numerous lessons that we would do well to learn from Saul's life, and my hope is that we've gleaned as many truths as possible.

1 Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell slain on Mount Gilboa.

- Couple of thoughts here right out of the shoot, the first of which has to do with how that the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines.
- It would seem that they had lost complete confidence in Saul as their king and as their leader so much so that they would both flee and fall.
- To me, this speaks to how it is that those in leadership positions bear the weight of a greater responsibility for those under their leadership.

James 3:1 (NIV) — 1 Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

- The second thought has to do with how close David came to actually being in this battle with the Philistines against his own people, Israel.
- But God, in His mercy and grace, creates this conflict concerning the Philistines distrust of David, and in so doing God then delivers David.
- It's important to keep in mind that David is still in Ziklag as this is happening. This after God had given him the victory over the Amalekites.

2 Then the Philistines followed hard after Saul and his sons. And the Philistines killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul's sons.

- This is amongst the most tragic passages in the Bible, the death of Saul's three sons chief of whom is Jonathan, David's most loyal friend.
- While David must at this time know that his fellow Israelites are in battle, he has yet to find out that his king and his friend will both die in it.
- The question becomes one of why? Why did they have to die? For the answer, I'd like to share with you what one commentator wrote.

Tragically, Saul's sons were affected in the judgment of God against their father Saul. The brave and worthy Jonathan died as we might expect him to—loyally fighting for his God, his country, and his father the king unto the very end. ...Their death was tragic, yet important in God's plan. In taking the logical heirs to Saul's throne, God cleared the way for David to become the next king of Israel. We know that if Jonathan had survived he would have gladly yielded the throne to David. But the same could not be said of Saul's other sons. God was also merciful to Jonathan, sparing him the ordeal of having to side with David against his own brothers.

Of this another commentator wrote, "There was also a special providence of God in taking away Jonathan, (who of all Saul's sons seems to have been the fairest for the crown,) for the preventing divisions, which have happened amongst the people concerning the successor; David's way to the crown being by this means made the more clear."

- We do err greatly when we presume upon the ways of the Lord. By that I mean we mistakenly presuppose that God will do it in our way.
- More specifically, our way would be for Jonathan to not be killed in this battle. The problem is we cannot see the end from the beginning.
- Often times, God will deem it fit for us to lose a Jonathan as it were, to protect us from what He knows will be a much more difficult trial.

There's an example of this in the gospel of Mark, 6:45-52 - 45 Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46 After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. 47 Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. 48 He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, 49 but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, 50 because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." 51 Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, 52 for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

- Notice how that in verse 45 we're told Jesus "immediately ...made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to Bethsaida."
- Question, why is Jesus in such a hurry to get them in the boat and relocate them to Bethsaida? Answer, to protect them from a greater trial.
- Namely, that of the multitudes that were just miraculously fed from the fishes and loaves, had they stayed on that side of the Sea of Galilee.

- Now I am keenly aware that staying on the side of the Sea of Galilee where multitudes were miraculously fed hardly seems like it's a trial.
- However, the Lord Who sees the end from the beginning knows the greater trial would be that they would become heady had they stayed.
- It's for this reason that the Lord knowingly sends them into the lesser trial of a storm to protect them from the greater trial had they stayed.

- So too is this true for David. The Lord Who sees the end from the beginning knows that the greater trial would be if Jonathan had lived.
- As such the Lord knowingly sends him into the lesser trial of Jonathan's death to protect him from the greater trial of Jonathan having lived.
- On a personal note, one of the things I'm learning in my walk with Jesus Christ is God knows best when things don't work out as I hoped.

- Let me explain, the disciples had hoped that Jesus would let them stay where the miracle of the feeding of the multitudes had taken place.
- This because of what we're told in verse 52 where it says their hearts were hardened because they had not understood about the loaves.
- In other words, they misunderstood God's way of not having them stay and the narrative seems to indicate they resented it in their hearts.

- The reason I point this out is that we're prone to harbor resentment in our hearts when we don't understand the way God does something.
- This is especially true when it's something we see as being good. Like the disciples, we don't understand why staying isn't a good thing.
- The problem is that our ways are not God's ways, such that, His ways are too high for our understanding His thoughts beyond my knowing.

Isaiah 55:8-10 (NKJV) — 8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.

3 The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him, and he was severely wounded by the archers. 4 Then Saul said to his armorbearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me." But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it.

- This is one of those places in God's Word where at first glance one would come away thinking that the Bible is actually contradicting itself.
- The reason being is that we have a conflicting account recorded in the next chapter, chapter 2, which, Lord willing, we will study next week.
- Perhaps you'll indulge me for just a moment as I read verses 6-10 in 2 Samuel. I do so because it will be germane to our understanding it.

2 Samuel 1: 6-10 - 6 "I happened to be on Mount Gilboa," the young man said, "and there was Saul, leaning on his spear, with the chariots and their drivers in hot pursuit. 7 When he turned around and saw me, he called out to me, and I said, 'What can I do?' 8 "He asked me, 'Who are you?' " 'An Amalekite,' I answered. 9 "Then he said to me, 'Stand here by me and kill me! I'm in the throes of death, but I'm still alive.' 10 "So I stood beside him and killed him, because I knew that after he had fallen he could not survive. And I took the crown that was on his head and the band on his arm and have brought them here to my lord."

- I would suggest that not only is there no contradiction whatsoever, in fact, there is actually a life lesson to be learned from both accounts.
- First, concerning there being no contradiction, allow me to quote Henry Morris, who I believe has the best answer explaining why it's not.

Henry Morris, "There is a superficial conflict between this account and that of 2 Samuel 1:2-10, where a young Amalekite in Saul's army claimed to have slain Saul. Although there is a possibility that he had fabricated the story, hoping thereby to ingratiate himself with David, it is more likely that Saul's life continued in him for a while even after he 'took a sword, and fell upon it', and that he did indeed request the Amalekite to slay him as he lay dying. In any case, David was not pleased. He himself had twice refused to slay 'the Lord's anointed' when he had the opportunity, and he would not condone this action. The young Amalekite, therefore, paid with his life.

- Herein lies the life lesson from this, mortify and put to death the deeds of the flesh before the Amalekite, a type of the flesh destroys you.
- It's interesting to note that Saul, who was commanded to kill all the Amalekites, not only loses his throne he also loses his life because of it.
- Here's the bottom line, when we are willing to allow the flesh to live, it can cost us our jobs, our families, our marriages, and even our lives.

5 And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword, and died with him. 6 So Saul, his three sons, his armorbearer, and all his men died together that same day.

- What makes Saul's death so tragic is conspicuously absent from the narrative is any mention of Saul ever turning to the Lord at the end.
- It's almost as if, even with his dying breath, he's so full of pride, he doesn't want word of his death to in any way be seen as dishonorable.

Charles Spurgeon said it best this way, "The unhappy king had forsaken the Lord, and had lost divine protection. He does not appear to have felt the slightest repentance, but to have been left to the hardness of his heart even to the end. His last thoughts had no reference to his sin and his God; his own poor honor before the world was still his dearest care, as it had been so long. O that he had minded more his reputation in the sight of God, and cared less for human esteem, then had he never been driven to such envy in life or such despair in death.

F.B. Meyer takes it a step further in his commentary by way of a personal application when he writes, "It is a very solemn thought! No career could begin with fairer, brighter prospects than Saul had, and none could close in more absolute midnight of despair; and yet such a fate may befall us, unless we watch, and pray, and walk humbly with our God."

7 And when the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley, and those who were on the other side of the Jordan, saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them. 8 So it happened the next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. 9 And they cut off his head and stripped off his armor, and sent word throughout the land of the Philistines, to proclaim it in the temple of their idols and among the people. 10 Then they put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan.

- For those of you who went to Israel with us back in 2008 or 2010, and for those who will go with us next year, have and will see Beth Shan.
- It's quite a remarkable place to visit for a number of reasons not the least of which is it's home to this graphic detail concerning his remains.
- Be that as it may, I can't get over the irony of it all. Saul, who seeks dignity in his death, is beheaded, mutilated and humiliated instead.

Again, Charles Spurgeon, while graphic, captures this very irony writing, "To the fallen king there happened the disgrace which he [sought] ...to escape. The plundering bands of the Philistines came to strip the dead bodies of their clothing, and, lo, upon the mountainside, not far from the corpses of his three sons, they discovered the remains of Saul, swimming in his own blood. Hearts of stone might have softened at the sight, but these barbarians [gloated] at it. They separated the king's head from the trunk, and stripped off his armour and weapons; sending the head from city to city as a trophy of their victory, fixing up the armour in the temple of their goddess, as a token of their gratitude to her, and leaving the body as an [humiliating] relic nailed to a wall."

11 Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, 12 all the valiant men arose and traveled all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth Shan; and they came to Jabesh and burned them there. 13 Then they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

- The chapter ends with a most fascinating account. It's one for which can be easily missed at first read, regarding the men of Jabesh Gilead.
- Here's why, these men risked their lives to travel all night long and repay Saul for what he had done for them some forty years prior to this.
- What I'm speaking of is 1 Samuel 11, when Saul also traveled all night long with 330,000 men to deliver Jabesh Gilead from the Ammonites.